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How Many Iraqis Have Died in the War? 30,000? No. 100,000?

By Andrew Cockburn

President Bush's recent off-hand summation of the number of Iraqis who have so far died as a result of the U.S. invasion and occupation as "30,000, more or less" was quite certainly an under-estimate. The true number is probably hitting around 180,000 by now, with a possibility, as we shall see, that it has reached as high as half a million. Almost as soon as President Bush, speaking in Philadelphia in mid-December, enumerated the Iraqis who have died as a result of our invasion and occupation as "30,000, more or less", his handlers hastened to downplay the presidential number as "unofficial", plucked by Bush from "public estimates". Such calculations have been discouraged ever since the oafish General Tommy Franks infamously announced at the time of the 2003 invasion, "We don't do body counts". In December 2004, an effort by the Iraqi Ministry of Health to quantify ongoing mortality on the basis of emergency room admissions was halted by direct order of the occupying power.

In fact, the President may have been subconsciously quoting figures published by iraqbodycount.org, a British group that diligently tabulates published press reports of combat-related killings in Iraq. Due to IBC's policy of posting minimum and maximum figures, currently standing at 27,383 and 30,892, their numbers carry an air of scientific precision that is perhaps misleading. As the group itself readily concedes, the estimate must be incomplete, since it omits unreported deaths.

There is, however, another and more reliable method for estimat-

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How the FBI Spied on Edward Said

By DAVID PRICE

The FBI has a long, ignoble tradition of monitoring and harassing Amer-i ca's top intellectuals. While people ranging from Albert Einstein, William Carlos Williams to Martin Luther King have been subjected to FBI surveillance, there remains an under-accounting of the ways in which this monitoring at times hampered the reception of their work.

In response to my request under the Freedom of Information Act, filed on behalf of *CounterPunch*, the FBI recently released 147 of Said's 238-page FBI file. There are some unusual gaps in the released records, and it is possible that the FBI still holds far more files on Professor Said than they acknowledge. Some of these gaps may exist because new Patriot Act and National Security exemptions allow the FBI to deny the existence of records; however, the released file provides enough information to examine the FBI's interest in Edward Said..

Most of Said's file documents FBI surveillance campaigns of his legal, public work with American-based Palestinian political or pro-Arab organizations, while other portions of the file document the FBI's ongoing investigations of Said as it monitored his contacts with other Palestinian-Americans. That the FBI should monitor the legal political activities and intellectual forays of such a man elucidates not only the FBI's role in suppressing democratic solutions to the Israeli and Palestinian problems, it also demonstrates a continuity with the FBI's historical efforts to monitor and harass American peace activists.

Edward Said's wife, Mariam, says she is not surprised to learn of the FBI's surveillance of her husband, saying, "We always knew that any political activity concerning the Palestinian issue is monitored and when talking on the phone we would say 'let the tappers hear this'. We believed that our phones were tapped for a long time, but it never bothered us because we knew we were hiding nothing."

The FBI's first record of Edward Said appears in a February 1971 domestic security investigation of another unidentified individual. The FBI collected photographs of Said from the State Department's passport division and various news agencies. Said's "International Security" FBI file was established when an informant gave the FBI a program from the October 1971 Boston Convention of the Arab-American University Graduates, where Said chaired a panel on "Culture and the Critical Spirit". Most of Said's FBI records were classified under the administrative heading of "Foreign Counterintelligence," category 105, and most records are designated as relating to "IS – Middle East," the Bureau's designation for Israel.

Post-Patriot Act alterations of the Freedom of Information Act facilitate the FBI's efforts to keep significant portions of Said's FBI file classified – as if concerns with resolving Palestinian sovereignty from twenty or thirty years ago are indelibly linked to Bush's "war on terror". Large sections of Said's file remain redacted, with stamps indicating they remain Classified Secret until 2030, 25 years after their initial FOIA processing. One 1973 "Secret" report is now "exempt from General Declassification Schedule of Executive Order 11652, Exemption Category 2," and is "automatically declassified on indefinite". Such administrative stonewalling diminishes our ability to understand the past and further complicates our ability to document the FBI's role in undermining domestic democratic movements.

In February 1972, New York FBI agents produced a report listing Said's employment at Columbia University, his home address

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The NYT and the NSA's Illegal Spying

By Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St Clair

When it comes to zeal in protecting the Bill of Rights, between December 22, 1974 and December 16, 2005 it's been a steady run down hill for the *New York Times*. Thirty-one years ago, almost to the day, here's how Seymour Hersh's lead, on the front page of the NYT, began:

"The Central Intelligence Agency, directly violating its charter, conducted a massive, illegal domestic intelligence operation during the Nixon Administration against the antiwar movement and other dissident groups in the United States, according to well-placed Government sources."

And here's the lead paragraph of the NYT's frontpage story December 16th by James Risen and Eric Lichtblau:

"Months after the September 11 attacks, President Bush secretly authorized the National Security Agency to eavesdrop on Americans and others inside the United States to search for evidence of terrorist activity without the court-approved warrants ordinarily required for domestic spying, according to government officials."

Government illegality is the sinew of Hersh's first sentence. He says that what the CIA did was illegal and that it violated the CIA's charter. What the NSA has been doing is also illegal. Its warrantless domestic eavesdropping is in direct violation of the 1978 law which came about as a direct result of Hersh's expose and the congressional hearings that followed. The eavesdropping also violates the NSA's charter.

Yet it wasn't until the end of the third paragraph that Risen and Lichtblau wrote timidly, "Some officials familiar with the continuing operation have questioned whether the surveillance has stretched, if not crossed, constitutional limits on legal searches."

In the eighth paragraph of Risen and Lichtblau's story comes the shameful disclosure alluded to above:

"The White House asked the *New York Times* not to publish this article, arguing that it could jeopardize continuing investigations and alert would-be terrorists that they might be under scrutiny. After meeting with senior administration officials, the newspaper delayed publication for a year to conduct additional reporting. Some information that administration officials argued could be useful to terrorists has been omitted."

Risen and Lichtblau shirk any direct estimate of how big the NSA's domestic spying has been, though one can deduce from the ninth paragraph of the story that probably many thousands of people had their phone conversations and emails illegally spied upon by the NSA.

The *Times* suggests that it held up the story for a year partly to do "additional reporting". This "additional reporting" seems to have yielded sparse results. Indeed, the December 16 *Washington Post* had a much more compact story by Dan Eggan that not only stressed the illegality in its first paragraph but had material that Risen and Lichtblau missed, namely that the NSA had begun its illegal program right after 9/11, even before Bush signed the executive order okaying the surveillance, some time in 2002. It was Eggan who reported that faxes had also been spied upon by the NSA.

And again, it was Eggan in the *Post* who put the NSA story in a larger context, namely the fact that in the past week the Pentagon has been forced to admit that military intelligence agencies such as the Defense Intelligence Agency have also been illegally surveilling US citizens within the US.

In the TALON Program (Threat and Local Observation Notice) a Pentagon unit called Counter Intelligence Field Activity (CIFA) has been amassing thousands of files on potential threats to US military installations. Many of the subjects of these files have turned out to be antiwar groups and anti-recruiting activists.

Eggan also reported that "Teams of Defense Intelligence Agency personnel stationed in major US cities [have been] conducting the type of surveillance typically performed by the FBI: monitoring the movements and activities — through high tech equipment of individuals and vehicles."

Who designed this policy? Deep in the *Times* story hardy readers trudging through Risen and Lichtblau's leaden prose would have tripped over vice president Cheney's name in the twenty-fifth paragraph where he is described as bringing congressional leaders to his office to brief them on the program. Only in the forty-eighth paragraph do such readers as have survived the trek learn that the legal brief justifying this onslaught on the US Constitution was written by Professor John Yoo, at that time at the Department of Justice.

Members of Congress, aside from Senator Jay Rockefeller, raised no demur. It was the judiciary, in the form of judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly, presiding over the secret intelligence court established by FISA, who reprimanded Justice Department lawyers for trying to get legal warrants from her, using as "probable cause" data from the illegal surveillance, although not admitting this.

In fact it's something of a puzzle why the *Times* finally did publish the story, after sitting on the information leaked to it by the NSA officials worried that they might get prosecuted for illegal surveillance. It is true that publication came in the closing hours of the battle in the US Senate over reauthorization of the Patriot Act. And it's probably true that the publication of the story pushed enough wavering senators into the ranks of those who on Friday successfully fought to get the bill shelved, in a major defeat for the White House.

It's also true that all year Risen has been hard at work on a book about the conduct of US intelligence agencies in the "war on terror" after 9/11, slated for release soon.

The book's launch will no doubt be accompanied by some new disclosure by Risen, designed to give the book lift up the charts. Perhaps that too will be a story he's been keeping in the larder for months. CP

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ing figures such as these: nationwide random sampling. No one doubts that, if the sample is truly random and the consequent data correctly calculated, the sampled results reflect the national figures accurately That, after all, is how market researchers assess public opinion on everything, from politicians to breakfast cereals. Epidemiologists use it to chart the impact of epidemics. In 2000, an epidemiological team led by Les Roberts of Johns Hopkins School of Public Health used random sampling to calculate the death toll from combat and consequent disease and starvation in the ongoing Congolese civil war at 1.7 million. This figure prompted headlines and immediate action by the U.N. Security Council. No one questioned the methodology.

In September 2004, Roberts led a similar team that researched death rates, using the same techniques, in Iraq before and after the 2003 invasion. Making "conservative assumptions", they concluded that "about 100,000 excess deaths" (in fact 98,000) among men, women, and children had occurred in just under eighteen months. Violent deaths alone had soared twentyfold. But, as in most wars, the bulk of the carnage was due to the indirect effects of the invasion, notably, the breakdown of the Iraqi health system. Thus, though many commentators contrasted the iraqbodycount and Johns Hopkins figures, they are not comparable. The bodycounters were simply recording, or at least attempting to record, deaths from combat violence, while the medical specialists were attempting something far more complete, an accounting of the full death toll wrought by the devastation of the U.S. invasion and occupation.

Unlike the respectful applause granted the Congolese study, this one, published in the British medical journal *The Lancet*, generated a hail of abusive criticism. The general outrage may have been prompted by the unsettling possibility that Iraq's liberators had already killed a third as many Iraqis as the reported 300,000 murdered by Saddam Hussein in his decades of tyranny.

Some of the attacks were self-evidently absurd. British Prime Minister Tony Blair's spokesman, for example, queried the survey because it "appeared to be based on an extrapolation technique rather than a detailed body count", as if Blair had never made a political decision based on a poll.

Some questioned whether the sample was distorted by unrepresentative hot spots such as Fallujah. In fact, the amazingly dedicated and courageous Iraqi doctors who actually gathered the data visited 33 "clusters" selected on an entirely random basis across the length and breadth of Iraq. In each of these clusters the teams conducted interviews in 30 households, again selected by rigorously random means. As it happened, Fallujah was one of the clusters thrown up by this process. Strictly speaking, the team should have included the data from that embattled city in their final result – random is random after all – which would have given an overall post-invasion excess death figure of no less than 268,000. Nevertheless, erring on the side of caution, they eliminated Fallujah from their sample.

For such scholarly integrity, Roberts and his colleagues had to endure the ignorance of Michael E. O'Hanlon of the Brookings Institute, who told the *New York Times* that the deficient Iraqbodycount estimate was "certainly a more serious work than the *Lancet* report".

The possibility that the U.S. has actually helped kill as many as half a million people suggests a war crime of truly twentieth-century proportions.

No point in the study attracted more confident assaults by ersatz statisticians than the study's passing mention of a 95 per cent "confidence interval" for the overall death toll of between 8,000 and 194,000. This did not mean, as asserted by commentators, that the true figure lay anywhere between those numbers and that the 98,000 number was produced merely by splitting the difference. In fact, the 98,000 figure represents the best estimate drawn from the data. The high and low numbers represented the spread, known to statisticians as "the confidence interval", within which it is 95 per cent certain the true number will be found. Had the published study (which was intensively peer reviewed) cited the 80 per cent confidence interval also calculated by the team – a statistically respectable option – then the spread would have been between 152,000 and 44,000.

Seeking further elucidation on the mathematical tools available to reveal the hidden miseries of today's Iraq, CounterPunch turned our consultant statistician, Pierre Sprey. He reviewed not only the Iraq study as published in the *Lancet*, but also the raw data collected in the household survey and kindly forwarded me by Dr. Roberts.

"I have the highest respect for the rigor of the sampling method used and the meticulous and courageous collection of the data. I'm certainly not criticizing in any way Robert's data or the importance of the results. But they could have saved themselves a lot of trouble had they discarded the straitjacket of Gaussian distribution in favor of a more practical statistical approach", says Sprey. "As with all such studies, the key question is that of 'scatter,' i.e., the random spread in data between each cluster sampled. So, cluster A might have a ratio of twice as many deaths after the invasion as before, while cluster B might experience only two-thirds as many. The academically conventional approach is to assume that scatter follows the bell-shaped curve, otherwise known as 'normal distribution,' popularized by Carl Gauss in the early 19th century. This is a formula dictating that the most frequent occurrence of data will be close to the mean, or center, and that frequency of occurrence will fall off smoothly and symmetrically as data scatters further and further from the mean – following the curve of a bell-shaped mountain as you move from the center of the data.

"Generations of statisticians have had it beaten in to their skulls that any data that scatters do so according to the iron dictates of the bell-shaped curve. The truth is that in no case has a sizable body of naturally occurring data ever been proven to follow the curve". (A $200,000 prize offered in the 1920s for anyone who could provide rigorous evidence of a natural occurrence of the curve remains unclaimed.)

"Slavish adherence to this formula obscures information of great value. The true shape of the data scatter almost invariably contains insights of great physical or, in this case, medical importance. In particu-

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and phone number, including a notation that his home telephone service was provided by New York Telephone Company – information that was later used to request listings of all toll calls charged to Said's home phone number. A July 1972 FBI report indicates Said received a phone call from someone who was the subject of intensive FBI surveillance. The NYC agent wrote that "reasons for phone call, activities of the professor, and his sympathies in relation to [blank in the document] matters have not been ascertained".

In the months after the attacks at the 1972 Munich Olympics there was a flurry of FBI interest in Said and other Palestinian Americans. In early October 1972, the NY FBI office investigated Said's background and citizenship information as well as voting, banking and credit records. Employees at Princeton and Columbia Universities gave FBI agents biographical and education information on Said, and the Harvard University Alumni Office provided the FBI with detailed information. As Middle East scholar Steve Niva observes, "looking back, this post-Munich period may have marked an historic turning point when statements in support of the Palestinian cause became routinely equated with sympathies for terrorism."

The FBI spoke with their "Middle East informants" in Boston, Newark and New York to gather information on Said. One report indicated that "several confidential sources who are familiar with Middle East [blank in the document]in the United States were contacted during 1972 and 1973, but were unable to furnish any information pertaining to Edward William Said." During this investigation, FBI agents located and read a 1970 *Boston Globe* article headlined "Columbia Professor Blames Racist Attitude for Arab-Israeli Conflict".

One FBI report detailed events at the fifth annual convention of the Association of Arab-American University Graduates (AAAUG) held in November 1972 in Berkeley. Said was living in Lebanon at the time and did not attend the conference, but because he was a member of the AAAUG Board of Directors, the FBI included their convention report in his FBI file. There was a significant FBI presence at the conference, and the FBI's released records include the conference program indicating presentations from a selection of Arab-American scholars such as anthropologists Laura Nader and Barbara Aswad.

The extent of the FBI's surveillance of the conference is seen in the FBI's list (provided by a "reliable" FBI informer) of all AAAUG convention's attendees staying at the Claremont Hotel. Why the FBI collected information on conference attendees' accommodations is not clear. Was it to break into participants' rooms to plant listening devices, search for documents, or to monitor attendees? The redacted report does not say, but the FBI's well-documented reliance on such "black bag jobs" during this period raises this as a likely possibility. The FBI's report contains summaries of several talks.

In January 1973, the FBI undertook further criminal and biographical background checks on Said, and the New York Special Agent in Charge recommended in February that the case be closed. But an FBI investigation the next month of a "subject [who had] traveled in the United States in 1971" began a new investigation of Said as one of several individuals whose phone numbers had come to the attention of the FBI and were believed to have possible "connections with Arab terrorist activities." Such alleged connections remain unspecified as do Said's connections to such activities, but such vague associations are frequently used to keep investigations active.

An FBI informer indicated that "he did not consider Said to be the type of individual who would be involved in any terrorist activity".

FBI memos from this period discuss the creation of a LHM (Letterhead Memorandum, meaning a memo identified as coming from the FBI) that "should be suitable for dissemination to foreign intelligence agencies". The agency or country to receive this LHM report is not identified, but Israel's Mossad was a likely candidate.

During the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War the FBI collected several of Said's newspaper columns and interviews, and his file includes a *New York Times* column arguing that Arabs and Jews in the Middle East had historically been pitted against each other rather than against "imperialist powers". In 1974, the FBI received word that Said would speak at the Canadian Arab Federation Conference in Windsor, Ontario, and the Bureau again tracked Said's movements, though an FBI informer indicated that "he did not consider Said to be the type of individual who would be involved in any terrorist activity".

The FBI made no entry in Edward Said's file in 1978, the year of the publication of his groundbreaking book, *Orientalism*.

A July 1979 FBI report summarized information on thirty-six individuals (names blacked out in the released documents) preparing to attend the August 1979 Palestine American Congress (PAC) at the Shoreham-Americana Hotel in Washington, D.C. The FBI noted that Said was an ex-officio member of the council. Snippets of paragraphs on other unidentified attendees mention past academic and political conferences attended, and one FBI informant is identified as being linked to the "pro-Iraqi Ba'ath Party". FBI offices receiving this report were advised to check their files for pertinent information on any of the mentioned individuals.

The extent of the FBI's conference surveillance is shown in a partially declassified Secret Report Index indicating that attendee records had been consulted from FBI field offices in twenty-five listed cities alphabetically listed from Albany to Washington. This report contains sentence summaries on participants. Said's summary, for example, says, "EDWARD SAID – Previously identified as being from Columbia University, New York City, New York, and as being deeply affiliated with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine." Other released passages find the FBI preoccupied with tracing various attendees' PFLP sympathies.

The PAC was perhaps the most open and democratic deliberative effort by displaced American Palestinians to address the goals of the Palestinian struggle. With great concern the FBI documented how the PAC "created a Preparatory Committee that empowered it to prepare a working paper on a proposed constitution for some mechanism for collaborative action".

The FBI noted some internal arguments about the legitimacy of some delegates coming from Arab communities with low Palestinian populations. The FBI reported that one delegate at the Congress "reminded all in attendance that the FBI has no legitimate interest in the activities taking place during the three day convention. There was no reason to be afraid of one's presence at all functions of the PAC." Without irony the FBI then noted with concern that some present used false names to register their hotel rooms.

Following opening remarks by Jawad George, another speaker described in the FBI

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report as a revolutionary black male named Smith, "ensured the PAC that the black Americans would render assistance to Arab revolution." Other speakers discussed in the FBI report included a member of the Organization of Arab Students and Ramallah Mayor Krim Khlif speaking on efforts to establish a Palestinian State on the West Bank.

The FBI report discussed problems arising at the conference's conclusion when there was "much discussion on just the preamble to the constitution. Strong disagreement on the wording of a sentence concerning return to its national homeland, to national self-determination, and to its national independence and sovereignty in all of Palestine, by the Arab peoples." Fights over the wording of the constitution's preamble continued, and several disputes "almost broke out into fist fights" between rival factions. Said's FBI file contains a copy of the "Proposed Constitution of the Palestine American Congress" that had been distributed to PAC attendees, which the FBI marked as classified "SECRET." This information provided by an FBI informant from this period has now been reclassified under the Patriot Act, making the document classified "Secret" until the year 2029.

In May 1982, the New York FBI Special Agent in Charge sent a Secret report to FBI director William Webster saying that Said's name had "come to the attention of the N.Y. [FBI Office] in the context of a terrorist matter." FBI headquarters was then requested "to contact liaison with State Department's Middle East section with regard to their knowledge of Said". A week later, Said's file gained a photograph of him addressing the December 1980 Palestine Human Rights Campaign National Conference. One 1982 newspaper clipping added to the file attempted to connect his wife Mariam Said and the PLO to the funding of a full-page anti-Israel advertisement in the *New York Times*.

During the summer of 1982 an unidentified individual was arrested and deported from the United States, and the "INS obtained photocopies of all documents in his possession". Among this deported individual's papers was Edward Said's name and home phone number. Documents relating to Said and this deportation are still being withheld and are being vetted under National Security Classification review processes.

On September 3, 1982, FBI Director Webster instructed FBI librarians at Quantico to use their computerized *New York Times* index to locate all past references to Said. This generated a thirteen-page report containing abstracts of forty-nine *NYT* articles featuring Edward Said. These articles range from political columns by Said, features about him, to literary book reviews by Said. The *NYT's* Information Service was long used by the pre-Google FBI to compile dossiers on persons or organizations of interest.

Said's FBI file, in the form in which it reached me, concludes with a few redacted reports (now reclassified until the year 2030) from 1983 and a highly censored Classified Secret memo from August 1991 that ends with the suggestions that the FBI "may desire to contact your Middle East Section for additional information concerning Said".

Curiously, Said's FBI file, as released to me, contains no information on the remaining dozen years of his life. Either the FBI stopped monitoring him, or they couldn't locate these files, or they won't release this information or even the fact that the information exists in the files. The latter two possibilities seem far more likely.

It did not matter how frequently or clearly Edward Said declared that he "totally repudiated terrorism in all its forms". The FBI continued to focus its national security surveillance campaign on him. Had the FBI read the Palestine American Congress's proposed constitution placed in Said's file in 1979, they would have seen the group's commitment to upholding the "basic fundamental human and national rights of all people and affirms its opposition to racism in all of its manifestations including Zionism and anti-Semitism". Instead, they kept searching for connections to terrorism.

The FBI's surveillance of Edward Said was similar to their surveillance of other Palestinian-American intellectuals. For example, Ibrahim Abu Lughod's FBI file records similar monitoring – though Abu Lughod's file finds the FBI attempting to capitalize on JDL death threats as a means of interviewing Lughod to collect information for his file.

Having read hundreds of FBI reports summarizing "subversive" threads in the work of other academics, I am surprised to find that Said's FBI file contains no FBI analysis of his book *Orientalism*. This is especially surprising given the claims by scholars, like Hoover Institute anthropologist Stanley Kurtz in his 2003 testimony before the House Subcommittee on Select Education, that Said's post-colonial critique had left American Middle East Studies scholars impotent to contribute to Bush's "war on terror". Given what is known of the FBI's monitoring of radical academic developments it seems unlikely that such a work escaped their scrutiny, and it is reasonable to speculate that an analysis of *Orientalism* remains in unreleased FBI documents.

But some known things are obviously missing from the released file. Chief among these are records of death threats against Said and records of the undercover police protection he received at some public events. But there are no reasons to withhold such records, and their absence gives further cause to not believe the FBI's claim this is his entire releasable file.

The reasons for the temporal and thematic gaps in Said's file remain unknown. One explanation for such gaps is suggested in Kafka's *The Trial*, where reference is made to cases of suspects never cleared of vague accusations but who are instead given an "ostensible acquittal" under which the accused's dossier circulates for years, "backwards and forwards with greater or smaller oscillations" on "peregrinations that are incalculable". Perhaps such Kafkaesque forces move within the FBI, empowered by post-9/11 legislation and desires to shield the public's eye from acknowledgments of past persecutions of Edward Said. CP

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lar, it very frequently grossly exaggerates the true scatter of the data. Why? Simply because the mathematics of making the data fit the bell curve inexorably leads one to placing huge emphasis on isolated extreme 'outliers' of the data.

"For example, if the average cluster had ten deaths and most clusters had 8 to 12 deaths, but some had 0 or 20, the Gaussian math would force you to weight the importance of those rare points like 0 or 20 (i.e., 'outliers') by the square of their distance from the center, or average. So, a point at 20 would have a weight of 100 (20 minus 10 squared) while a point of 11 would have a weight of 1 (11 minus 10 squared.)

"This approach has inherently pernicious effects. Suppose for example one is studying survival rates of plant-destroying spider mites, and the sampled population happens to be a mix of a strain of very hardy mites and another strain that is quite vulnerable to pesticides. Fanatical Gaussians will immediately clamp the bell-shaped curve onto the overall population of mites being studied, thereby wiping out any evidence that this group is, in fact, a mixture of two strains.

"The commonsensical amateur meanwhile would look at the scatter of the data and see very quickly that instead of a single "peak" in surviving mites, which would be the result if the data were processed by traditional Gaussian rules, there are instead two obvious peaks. He would promptly discern that he has two different strains mixed together on his plants, a conclusion of overwhelming importance for pesticide application". (Sprey once conducted just such a statistical study at Cornell – a bad day for mites.)

So how to escape the Gaussian nightmare? "The answer lies in quite simple statistical techniques called 'distribution free' or 'non parametric' methods. These make the obviously more reasonable assumption that one hasn't the foggiest notion of what the distribution of the data should be, especially when considering data one hasn't seen – before one is prepared to let the data define their own distribution, whatever that unusual shape may be, rather than forcing them into the bell curve. The relatively simple computational methods used in this approach basically treat each point as if it has the same weight as any other, with the happy result that outliers don't greatly exaggerate the scatter.

"So, applying that simple notion to the death rates before and after the U.S. invasion of Iraq, we find that the confidence intervals around the estimated 100,000 'excess deaths' not only shrink considerably but also that the numbers move significantly higher. With a distribution-free approach, a 95 per cent confidence interval thereby becomes 53,000 to 279,000. (Recall that the Gaussian approach gave a 95 per cent confidence interval of 8,000 to 194,000.) With an 80 per cent confidence interval, the lower bound is 78,000 and the upper bound is 229,000. This shift to higher excess deaths occurs because the real, as opposed to the Gaussian, distribution of the data is heavily skewed to the high side of the distribution center".

Sprey's results make it clear that the most cautious estimate possible for the Iraqi "excess deaths" caused by the U.S. invasion is far higher than the 8,000 figure imposed on the Johns Hopkins team by the bell-curve approach. (The eugenicists of the 1920s were much enamored of Gaussian methodology.) The upper bounds indicate a reasonable possibility of much higher excess deaths than the 194,000 excess deaths (95 per cent confidence) offered in the study published in the *Lancet*.

The survey on which all these figures are based was conducted fifteen months ago. Assuming the rate of death has proceeded at the same pace since the study was carried out, Sprey calculates that deaths inflicted to date as a direct result of the Anglo-American invasion and occupation of Iraq could be, at best estimate, 183,000, with an upper 95 per cent confidence boundary of 511,000.

Given the furious reaction accorded the initial *Lancet* study, no such updated figure is likely to resonate in public discourse, especially when it registers a dramatic increase. Though the figures quoted by Bush were without the shadow of a doubt a gross underestimate (he couldn't even be bothered to get right the number of dead American troops), 30,000 dead among the people we were allegedly coming to save is still an appalling notion. The possibility that the U.S. has actually helped kill as many as half a million people suggests a war crime of truly twentieth-century proportions. CP

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